

LOCAL BUSINESS NETWORKS, CLUSTERS AND BUSINESS ECOSYSTEMS. FACTORS OF INFLUENCE ON FIRMS' COMPETITIVENESS IN GLOBAL MARKETS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Thesis is to examine the competitive conditions of firms belonging to local economic systems, taking into account the fact that actually, although globalization processes should lead to reduce the importance of local systems, clusters' and industrial districts' firms continue to demonstrate higher competitiveness than those that are not part of local systems.

For interpreting this issue, an empirical research has been conducted after having considered the extant literature on local system, with respect to which particular attention was paid to the Business Ecosystem approach. According to this latter perspective, the research has been carried out on the wine and mechanical industries, with the objective of identifying the factors of competitiveness form firms belonging to local systems. Factors have been identified in the light of the Resource Based View (RBV) applied to business ecosystems, which allowed to distinguish the resources of the individual firm from those context-related (natural, social, and infrastructural characteristics), and those of the local system itself (cluster-specific, including relationships, common values, culture, etc.).

The research was divided into three phases: i) the construction of an analysis framework to be followed for identifying the local context-related factors and the mechanisms influence on competitiveness of firms belonging to local systems; ii) a multiple-case study analysis focused on the wine industry, based on 10 cases of firms within a local production area; iii) a survey on a sample of 104 firms of the mechanical industry in a local economic system, which have been analyzed through descriptive statistics and a cluster analysis, followed by a focus group.

The results allowed to draw a conceptual model that links the factors analyzed in the two phases of research with the degree of competitiveness of firms. The latter, for measurement purposes, has bene expressed in terms of firms' performance, as the reference point to address the evaluation and measurements of the variable considered, to be conducted in future research development. Indeed the model proposed provides a basis for further researches on the competitiveness of local system's firms that could be extended to other industries in addition to those analyzed and to other countries.

The results of this research provide also indications for local economic policies, as well as for firms's management.

Keywords: Business ecosystems, Clusters, Industrial districts, Resource Based View.